

A political surprise

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The Conservative Party's shock victory in the 2015 General Election has left many pollsters and commentators with egg on their face. All the polls had pointed to a hung Parliament, and Conservative talk of a 'late surge' had begun to sound increasingly like self-delusion rather than realistic expectation. But, just as John Major did in 1992, David Cameron delivered that most elusive of Conservative goals – a Commons majority.

The election generated a number of 'Portillo Moments', with senior figures from all the main parties losing their seats. In addition to the loss of 'Big Beasts' in Scotland, such as Danny Alexander, Jim Murphy, Douglas Alexander and Charles Kennedy, there were high-profile casualties in England too: Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls, Lib Dem Cabinet Ministers Vince Cable and Ed Davey, UKIP leader Nigel Farage and even Conservative Employment Minister Esther McVey. A couple of returning heavyweights were waiting in the wings in the shape of Alex Salmond and Boris Johnson, who both won their new seats with handsome majorities.

Even with a Conservative majority, the next five years are unlikely to be a return to 'business as usual' for UK politics. A wafer-thin Conservative majority will force the party's whips to work overtime keeping truculent backbenchers in line and the Government will be eager to avoid by-elections at any cost. The Fixed Term Parliament Act means that a minority government could be unable to either pass legislation or initiate an election to secure a renewed mandate.

The Conservative and SNP victories look set to make the next five years a 'tale of two unions', with renewed debate over both Scotland's membership of the Union and the UK's future in the EU. Nicola Sturgeon fought the election vowing to 'lock the Tories out of government' but, if anything, the SNP's spectacular haul of Scottish seats (mostly at Labour's expense) have served to lock-in a Conservative Government and make a referendum on Britain's EU membership all but inevitable. The SNP and the Conservatives will now be on a collision course over plans to ensure 'English Votes for English Laws', further spending cuts and the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent.

Whatever happens in the next weeks, months and years, PLMR will be there to help you make sense of the changes, and how they affect your organisation.

Tories triumphant



James Ford is a Senior Consultant at PLMR and was an aide in the office of Mayor Boris Johnson MP

The surprise victory – and the party's first majority Government for 23 years – exceeded Conservative expectations and vindicated a campaign strategy that many senior Tory figures had openly questioned. The party's success will turn CCHQ's admiration for election guru Lynton Crosby into near reverence and mean that the Australian strategist is almost certain to run the Conservatives' London campaign in 2016.

But, as they clear away the champagne bottles and bunting at CCHQ, Conservative strategists should pore over the detail of the election results and still find cause for concern. Retaining the party's lone seat in Scotland helps the Conservatives side-step awkward questions about their legitimacy to form a truly national government, but the continued absence of Conservative MPs from so many urban areas in the North of England does not auger well for the future. Holding UKIP at bay in the south should not detract from the continued strength of UKIP support nationally or the number of seats where UKIP have become the main challengers to both Conservative and Labour incumbents. And, whilst the Conservatives held more of their marginal seats in London than expected, they still face an uphill struggle to retain control of City Hall next year.

Even as he appoints a Cabinet free of Lib Dem ministers for the first time, Prime Minister Cameron will realise that a small majority hands much more power to some of his most vociferous critics – his own backbenchers.

What next for Labour?

Danny Wilding is an Account Director at PLMR, and was involved in the Labour election campaign



One word sums up the last 12 hours for the Labour Party: disaster. Obliteration in Scotland, while widely predicted, has been compounded by failure to win against the Conservatives in key marginal seats outside London. Add to that the Conservatives' successful decimation of the Liberal Democrats throughout England, and the result leaves Labour badly beaten, and needing to find a new leader.

Ed Miliband pitched this election as a battle of ideas. Labour set out a distinctly different vision for the future of the country to the Conservatives and it is not clear if it was the vision or the man that the voters rejected. That said, can there be a more damning verdict of Labour's economic vision than for the Shadow Chancellor to have lost his seat?

From the moment the BBC released its exit poll at 10pm last night a cloud descended over the party. But upon reflection, the election started slipping away for Labour when the Conservatives shifted the discussion from policies to concerns of a Labour/SNP deal. It appears that this tactic has encouraged undecided voters to stick with what they know.

What is very clear is that the impact of Labour's ground war has been hugely over-estimated. Labour managed to hold five million conversations with voters in four months, but this has evidently failed to translate into votes. Activists have been left reeling – many thought this was the best campaign since 1997. Perhaps people's mistrust in Labour's ability to run the country after overseeing the economic crash was underestimated. This isn't to say everything with the campaign was wrong – mobilising that many volunteers is impressive, but leaning to the left and playing primarily to the core vote has not delivered a Labour Prime Minister. Clearly a campaign strategy post mortem is required.

The big question now is what next for Labour? It's not unforeseeable that the party could be out of power for longer than five years. The SNP have secured huge majorities in Scotland – the size of which may take longer than one parliament to overcome. That alone poses significant challenges for the party, not to mention the marginal seats where the Conservatives have increased their lead. Labour needs to learn its lessons quickly if it wants to govern in 2020.

Losing deposits - a liberal tradition



Steven Gauge is a Senior Consultant at PLMR and worked on the Liberal Democrat leader's general election tour

Every year at the Liberal Democrat conference, the party faithful sing a song called "Losing Deposits" (to the tune of Waltzing Matilda) remembering the days when the old Liberal party used to be able to fit its entire parliamentary party into a London taxi. Well now that the Liberal Democrat MPs can be easily squeezed into a modest people carrier, and local party treasurers are informed that they won't be getting their £500 back from the Returning Officers, the old song may be a little more difficult to sing this year.

It was an emotional and devastating night for the Liberal Democrats, losing much loved party stalwarts in what were thought to be unassailable seats: Charles Kennedy, Vince Cable, Simon Hughes, Ed Davey and many more. The post mortem will be painful but former Ministers will cling with pride to their achievements in government: ending child detention for asylum seekers, pension reform, apprenticeships, the pupil premium and equal marriage.

Whilst the election campaign was upbeat, positive and well organised on the ground there was simply no getting away from what the electorate felt was a breach of trust on tuition fees and the damage that did to the party's reputation and credibility. No amount of brilliant battle bus photo opportunities or beautifully designed leaflets shoved through letterboxes could shift the polls during the six week campaign. The party stuck firmly on 8% and no seats and no deposits were safe.

Tim Farron was always going to be the next leader of the party but now the field of possible candidates to stand against him has been dramatically reduced. He is popular with party members, untainted by the coalition and, most importantly, is still an MP. He may well try to position the party back again to the left of Labour. The problem for the Liberal Democrats is that particular place on the political spectrum is a little bit more crowded now.

Scotland's independence campaign is not over yet

Uche Graves is a Senior Account Executive at PLMR who studied in Scotland and has worked closely with the PLMR Scotland office

Riding on the wave of Scottish nationalism and political fervour whipped up in September's independence referendum, the SNP has transformed Scotland's political make-up in a dramatic landslide. They took 56 seats (up from 6 in 2010) and virtually wiped out every other party, leaving the Conservatives, Lib-Dems and Labour with only one seat each.

By any measure, it's a bloodbath for Labour and the Lib Dems. Big hitters such as the Scottish Labour leader, Jim Murphy, the ex Lib-Dem leader, Charles Kennedy, and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander, have lost their seats.



For the SNP, the tale of this election is best told through the story of Mhairi Black, the 20 year old student who yesterday unseated Labour's Douglas Alexander, the Shadow Foreign Secretary and Labour's campaign chief, who had represented Paisley South for 18 years. Mhairi discovered her political calling during the referendum campaign where she cut her teeth, and discovered that she spoke the Scottish voters' language because she was so distant from the Westminster 'establishment'. As a Paisley voter

put it: 'Mhairi knows what it's like to not be paid the Living Wage, the difference between her and career politicians, she speaks more to me than any other ever has'.

But what effect will this landslide have on British politics as a whole. Scottish First Minister and SNP Leader, Nicola Sturgeon (who did not stand in this election) wanted to 'lock the Tories out of government'. This has not happened, but the SNP is now the 3rd largest party in Westminster. Despite the Tory majority, she claims, no government can be seen to be running rough-shod over the self-evident will of the Scottish people.

The result could have huge implications for the future of the union and for the future of our democracy. It is worth noting that the SNP have taken 56 seats with only 4.8% of the total vote in the UK. By comparison, UKIP won 12.6% of the popular vote, but took just one seat. Unsurprisingly, it's prompted renewed calls for our first-past-the-post electoral system to be reformed.

Today's election result confirms that whatever blow Scottish nationalism was dealt in September's referendum defeat, the issue is not going away.

UKIP and Greens agree - on voting reform



Sarah Clarke is a Public Affairs & Media Relations Intern at PLMR, who has been involved in campaigning for the Green Party

In her victory speech, the Green Party's only MP, Caroline Lucas commented that the "political system in this country is broken... the time for proportional representation is long overdue." Similar comments came from Nigel Farage whilst standing down as UKIP leader after his loss in South Thanet, and this morning Lord Ashcroft Tweeted that "First Past the Post has had its day."

With proportional representation, both the Greens and UKIP would have fared significantly better, yet parties that received an estimated 1.1m and 3.8m votes respectively return to the next parliament a single MP each. In stark contrast, the SNP will be returning 56 MPs to parliament, with only around 300,000 more votes than the Green Party.

Both the Green Party and UKIP have made significant gains this election compared with 2010; UKIP came second in 118 seats, whilst the Green Party received a record number of votes and beat the Liberal Democrats in 60 seats, compared with only one in 2010. However, in their respective party HQs the gains in vote share will be tempered by the failure to translate this groundswell of support into tangible representation in the corridors of power.

From demanding a presence at the televised leadership debates, to making gains in local vote share across the country, the visibility and increase in support for smaller parties over the course of this election has made a strong case for reforming the first-past-the-post electoral system. The failure to create a parliament which represents the diversity of views in the UK could threaten to further fragment communities. But the Conservative Government holds the power here, and they may not be so keen for electoral reform.